FL Studio Cheat Book

Make Impressive Music, Quick.

Carmine Mastropierro

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Preface

Thank you for purchasing this book, I'm confident it will step up your production and your ability to make better tracks. I've been producing for upwards to 3 years using FL Studio exclusively so I've amassed a lot of shortcuts and knowledge on the software. Tie that together with some music theory knowledge and you can bang out awesome beats in minutes. I'm writing this book for any aspiring producers that use Fruity Loops and want to start creating better music quickly. It covers all of the things I've learned over the years including how to mix, master, common patterns, workflow hacks and more. Enjoy reading and leave a review afterwards if you have time.

Chapter 1: Creating Chords On Easy Mode

Some of the best producers right now specifically in hip hop barely even touch a piano or keyboard because they understand the secrets to creating chords. You don't need all of the music theory knowledge in the world to be composing complex chord progression if you follow these “codes”. They are an arrangement of numbers that you co-ordinate onto the FL Studio piano roll. Below is an example of how you could create a C minor chord.

I created this minor chord by starting on C5 or middle C as some would call it and placing a note on the 3rd and 7th notes above it. Remember that minor chords tends to sound more emotional and sad while major chords are bright and happy. This doesn't mean with the right notes you couldn't make a minor chord sound happy or a major chord sound sad though. For a rule of thumb though, minor is sad and major is happy.

Now if I wanted to create a major chord on the other hand, the code would be 0-4-8 as seen below.

Learning scales and chords will transform your music production. If you can play in key, you're ahead of many other producers instantly. Before I touch on understanding scales, here are some chord codes you can utilize when you're making beats.

MINOR CHORD CODES

Minor: 0-3-7

Minor 7th: 0-3-7-10

Minor 9th: 0-3-7-10-2^

Minor 11th: 0-3-7-10-2^-5^

Minor 13th: 0-3-7-10-2^-5^-9^

Minor 6th: 0-3-7-9

Minor major 7th: 0-3-7-11

MAJOR CHORD CODES

Major: 0-4-7

Major 7th: 0-4-7-11

Major 9th: 0-4-7-11-2^

Major 11th: 0-4-7-11-2^-5^

Major 13th: 0-4-7-11-2^-6^-9^

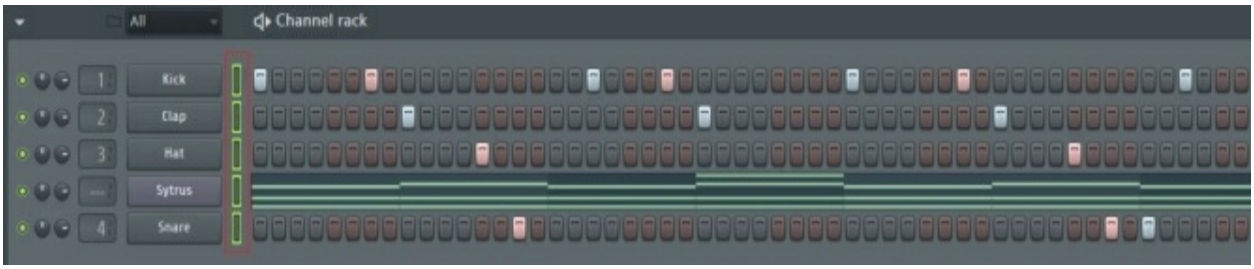
Major 6th: 0-4-7-9

Chapter 2: Mixing

A track that isn't mixed properly is going to sound distorted and muddy. Certain instruments and elements won't be heard as well as they should be and overall it lowers the quality of your music. Mixing is a balancing act that changes depending on exactly what you want and also the genre of music you make. We will be mostly focusing on hip hop in this book but it will translate easily to other styles of producing.

Mixing with FL Studio is easy once you understand the key concepts. It normally should happen after you've already laid out the beat for the most part and structured it. This means you have an intro, chorus, verse, bridge, etc placed on the playlist window.

To begin mixing your beat, we will need to insert every instrument into its own mixer track. The first step is to double click the select button on your channel rack. They will then all be highlighted green.



Next open up the mixer window and right click the first insert and route all of the selected to channels to their own track. This is going to enable us to start tweaking and adding effects to every individual element of the beat. Everything from adding reverb, carving out EQ, panning, volume and more will be at our disposal to manipulate.

The overall goal of mixing is to usually even all of elements of your beat out so everything can be heard. On the flipside, maybe you want a certain instrument or VST to be pushed to the back or however you are envisioning it. The mixer has everything you need to accomplish this. You can begin adding effects to individual mixer channels by selecting the slot on the right side and adding whatever plugin you want. Very common mixing plugins are:

- Fruity Parametric EQ 2
- Fruity Reverb 2
- Fruity Delay 2
- Fruity Fast Dist
- Gross Beat

Fruity Parametric EQ 2 enables you to strengthen or weaken

frequencies of a sample. For example you may want to increase the bass of an 808 kick so you raise it in that area a small amount. Below is an example of how I used this plugin to boost the kick I inserted to channel 1 around the 300hZ mark.

Kicks normally operate within the low bass, bass, and low mid sections you can see on the top heading. You can use the bandwidth and frequency knobs on the right bottom corner to make wider or thinner boosts/cuts exactly where you like. Clicking the tokens that are labelled 1 through 7 works just as well.

Since the snare is a very common instrument I'd also like to touch on how you can EQ one properly. Normally most producers think that snares are exclusively mid and high end frequencies but they usually have a nice low end too you can boost. Don't over do it or you may not hear other low-end instruments as well.

Last but not least I would also like to touch on how to brighten up your hi-hats since they are also a very often used instrument. With your hi-hat routed to a mixer insert, insert Fruity Parametric EQ 2 into the first effect slot and raise the 7th token up 2dB. You can also dial it back more towards the 6th token so you raise more of the high end.

Fruity parametric EQ 2 (Hat)
C1
C2
C3
C4
C5
C6
C7
C8
C9
LOW BASS
BASS
LOW MID
MID
UPPER MID
PRS
TREBLE
+18
+12
+6
0
-6
-12
-18
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
20
50
100
200
500
1k
2k
5k
10k
FREQ
BW
PARAMETRIC EQ 2
HQ
MONITOR
COMPARE

A crucial component of mixing properly is panning and stereo separation. This is the practice of having different elements sounding like they are being playing from a different direction. Below you can see on the mixer where you can manipulate panning and stereo separation.

The panning knob is very simple, if you move it to the right, the sound comes from the right. If you move it to the left, the sound comes from the left. Try it with your own beat and you'll hear it for yourself. Now with the stereo separation knob underneath, you either are merging it or separating it. Kicks and bass always want to be merged, which means you drag it all the way to the right. If you want a pad, chords or a harmonic like that to be wider and heard from both sides you would drag it to the left. Once you try this out for yourself you'll understand. It's very needed for kicks and bass to make them hit way harder.

The volume control of every mixer insert will also need some tweaking. Whatever you want to be in the forefront of your beat you will of course want to keep at a higher volume. Usually this means kicks, bass and snares in hip hop beats. Percussion in general you'll want very audible but the melody, synth and elements like that can be lowered. In hip hop the drums are always going to have most of your attention.

A basic way to level our your sounds once they are all inserted into the mixer is to drop them all down so they are not audible:

Next, one by one start bringing up the harmonics(melody, chords, etc), then the hats and percussion. Your harmonics should hit approximately -20dB when all playing together. This keeps them at a healthy level. Afterwords bring up your kick and bass until they are hitting around 0dB. Balance it out with your own ear and how you'd like it personally to sound. This is more of a rule of thumb to follow when you first get into mixing.

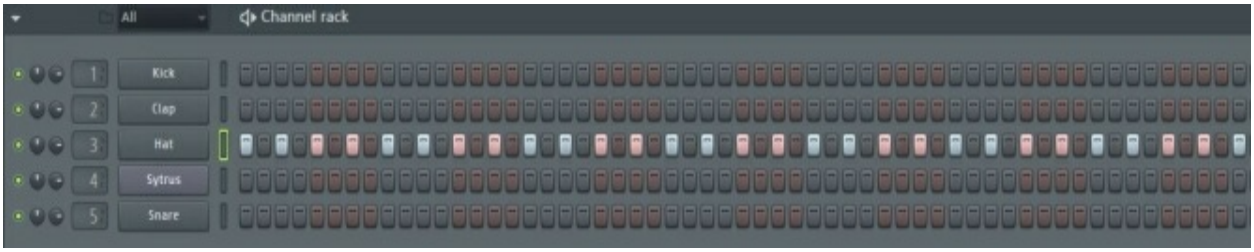
Just by understanding how to send all of your instruments to the mixer, EQ them, pan them and adjust their volume will improve your beats a lot. Reverb is good if you want a more spacey feeling around certain instruments or more realism.

Before you go to master your track after this, it's wise to turn down your master volume 6dB which creates some room to make it louder. You will understand in the next chapter when I show you how some simple mastering techniques.

Chapter 3: Common Sequencer Patterns

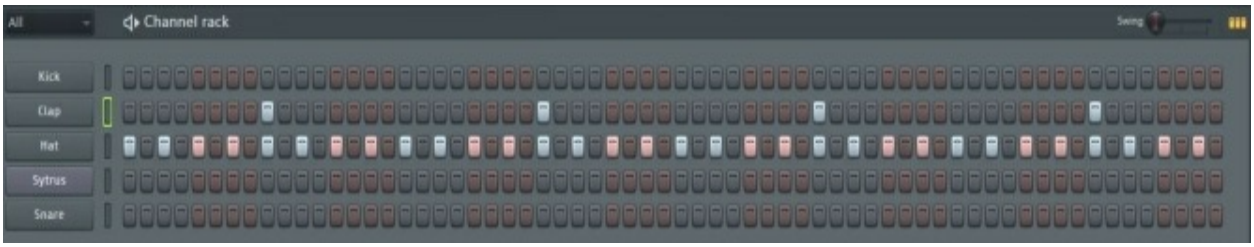
This is a cheat book after all so it's only necessary I include some common patterns that are popular in songs you probably listen to yourself. Try these out in some of your beats and I guarantee you'll hear a difference.

2 Step Hi-Hat



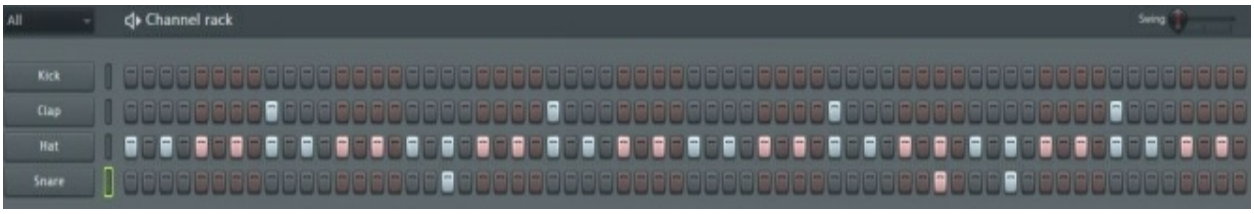
As simple as it gets and if you listen to any hip hop, pop music or in-between then you've heard this. Some times they don't even add any hi-hat rolls, it's literally just hitting every 2 steps. To do this, right click the hi-hat on the channel rack and select “Fill each 2 steps” and you'll get this.

Typical Clap Bounce



Claps add a great bounce to your tracks and above is a very common way to do it. You place the clap on the first step of every other grey set of steps. When you lay down a melody, put the 2 step hi-hat in and this bounce, suddenly your head is already nodding to the beat.

Typical Snare Bounce

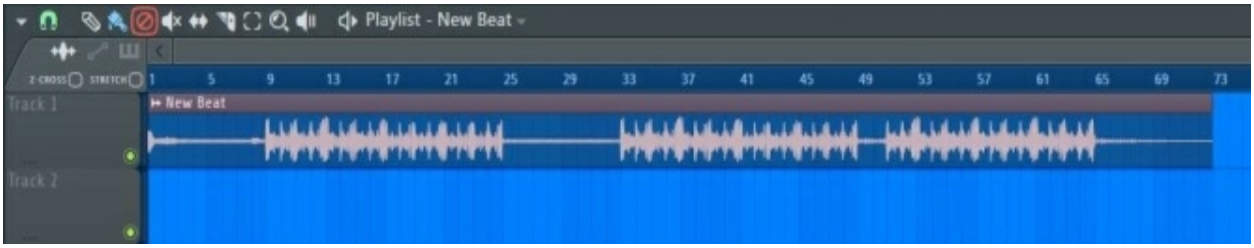


In between your claps you can add a snare at the positions you see above. You could also have the entire rhythm made up of snares or claps entirely which is very common in trap/hip hop. Listen to your favourite rap songs and there's probably this exact bounce being used. It has gotten repetitive to the point that producers have begun swapping out snares and claps for other percussion like rimshots for example. Murda Beatz is a prime example of this.

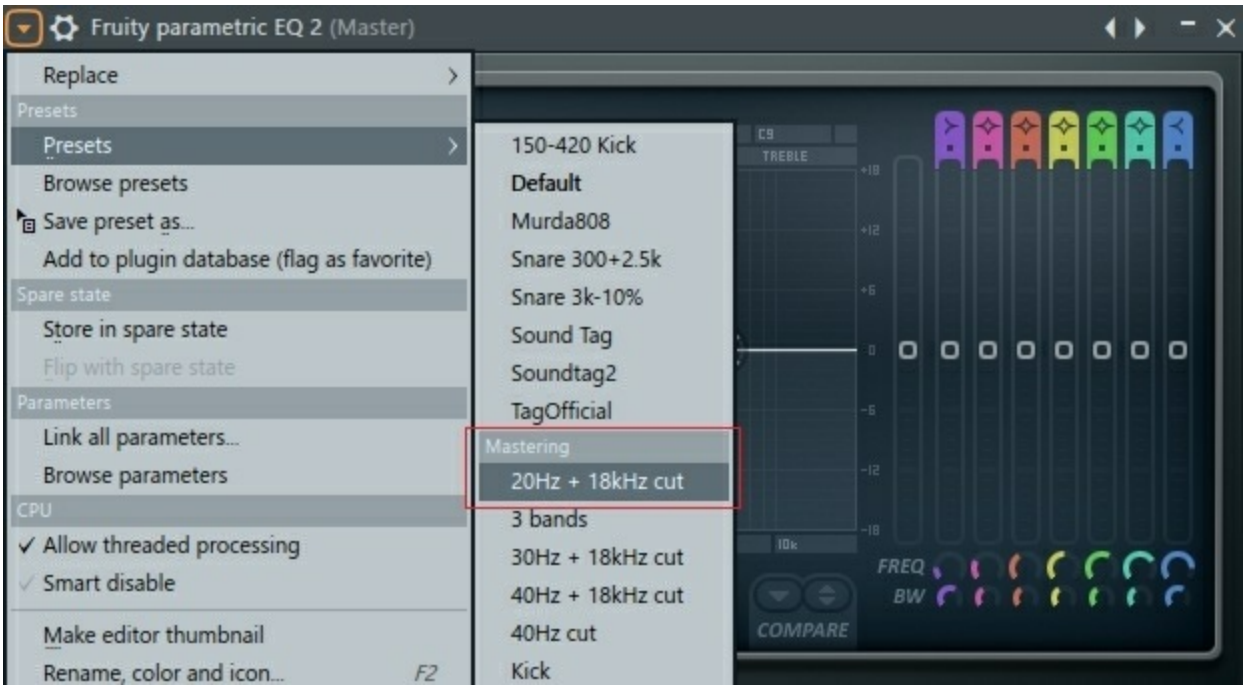
Chapter 4: Mastering

The final step to making your beats sound impressive is through the process of mastering. If you do a good job mixing then mastering can some times only take a few minutes. The goal is to get it as loud as possible, bring out sounds you want and lower others depending on your exact needs. We can master a track by exporting it into WAV form by going to File>Export>WAVE inside of FL Studio.

You then want to start a new project and drag the WAV file into your playlist as such:



Now open your mixer and instead of adding effects to the individual inserts, we will add them to the master channel to change the whole beat. The first thing I recommend doing is adding Fruity Parametric EQ 2 and selecting the first preset under “Mastering” which is the 20Hz + 18Hz cut.


Fruity parametric EQ 2 (Master)
Replace
Presets
Presets
Browse presets
Save preset as...
Add to plugin database (flag as favorite)
Spare state
Store in spare state
Flip with spare state
Parameters
Link all parameters...
Browse parameters
CPU
Allow threaded processing
Smart disable
Make editor thumbnail
Rename, color and icon... F2
150-420 Kick
Default
Murda808
Snare 300+2.5k
Snare 3k-10%
Sound Tag
Soundtag2
TagOfficial
Mastering
20Hz + 18kHz cut
3 bands
30Hz + 18kHz cut
40Hz + 18kHz cut
40Hz cut
Kick
TREBLE
FREQ
BW
COMPARE

This is going to cut off a very low and high frequency range that can't even be picked up by the human ear to begin with. We want to do this so those frequencies aren't even considered by the software when mastering the rest of the track.

In the next effect slot, add Maximus under “Dynamics”. This is a multi band compressor that will enable you to group up elements of your song and then manipulate them after. Just like the name suggests, it will add compression to assure your track doesn't clip and distort. I suggest that you go under presets and select “Clear Master” under “Mastering”. This is a great preset because it creates compression already for you but you'll want to select the pre and post gain knobs and reset them by right clicking.

Go through the mid, low and high tabs on the left to reset the pre/post gain knobs on all of them. On the master tab, assure it's turned on and drop the two points down -0.2dB to create a ceiling. On the low tab, turn the stereo

separation knob I highlighted all the way to the right. This is to assure that your low end is mono and centred as I mentioned earlier.

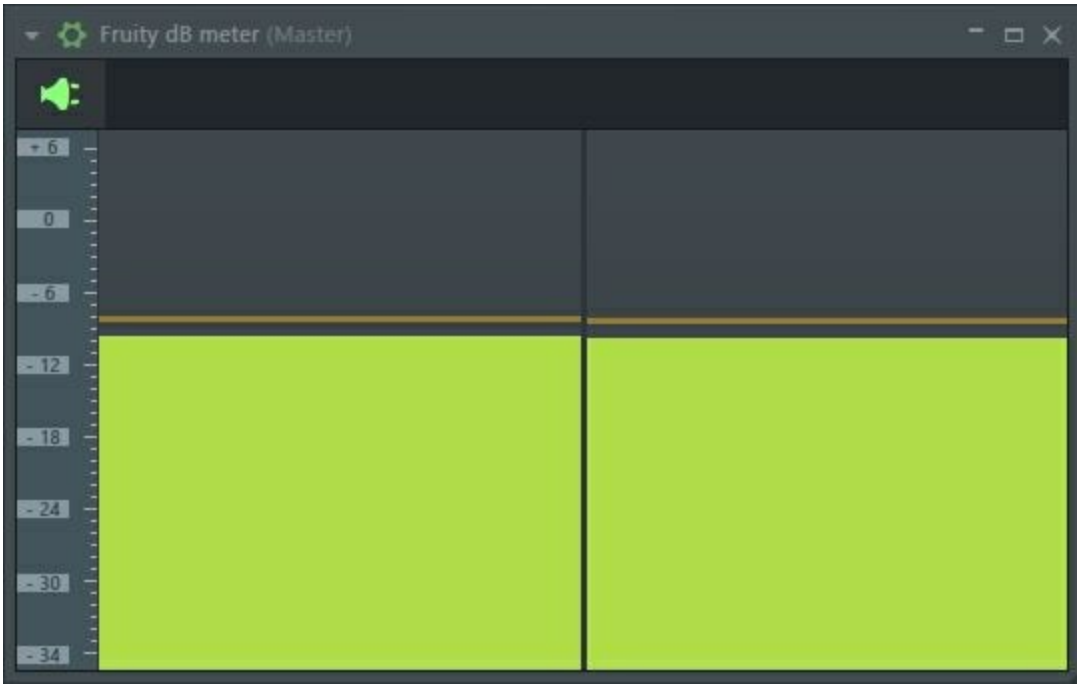
Multiband compression is a relatively complicated task so don't worry if you're under fully understanding this just yet. With some practice and extra research, you'll become an experienced engineer. Next we want to select “Bands” beside “Monitor” and follow these rules:

- Click the “Solo” button on the bottom left.
- Move the low band frequency knob until you only hear the low end like your bass and kick.
- Move the high band frequency knob until you can no longer hear the hi hat and high end elements.

What this is doing is grouping up the elements of your song into low, mid and high sections so they can all be applied effects. If you don't have much advanced theory on mastering, keep it simple. Click the low, mid or high tabs and dial the pre gain knob up or down depending on what you want.

For example maybe you want your highs a bit lower but your lows louder. When they are all combined like this it makes it a lot easier to do so.

At the very bottom of your Master insert on the mixer, insert “Fruity dB Meter” as the last effect. When you are playing your track, it will show you what decibel it's hitting.



This is crucial for mastering because we don't want it to go over 0dB because that results in distortion and clipping. The key is to get it as close to 0dB as possible which we are going to do by inserting “Fruity Limiter” under Maximus. You only need to tweak the gain knob and I recommend looping the loudest part of your song for the best idea of what your dB is at.

Slowly increase the gain knob and watch what dB the Fruity dB Meter hits. Continue to raise it until it hits just around 0 so you don't experience any distortion. If you lowered the master volume by 6dB when you mixed the original track and did your mixing pretty well, you should have some nice space to make it louder. At this point all you have to do is hit Control+A to select the entire playlist and click File>Export>Wave. Since the song is already in WAV form it will render out very quickly.

Play it and you should notice it sounds a lot better if you did everything I laid out. Don't worry if some of this was hard to grasp, keep doing it to your tracks and over time it will be second nature. You'll get a better feel of the plugins, VST's and what all of the little knobs or buttons do.

Chapter 5: Workflow Hacks

This chapter is going to center upon “hacks” I've discovered that can greatly increase your workflow and efficiency. They are not in any particular order as they help improve many different areas while you are making beats.

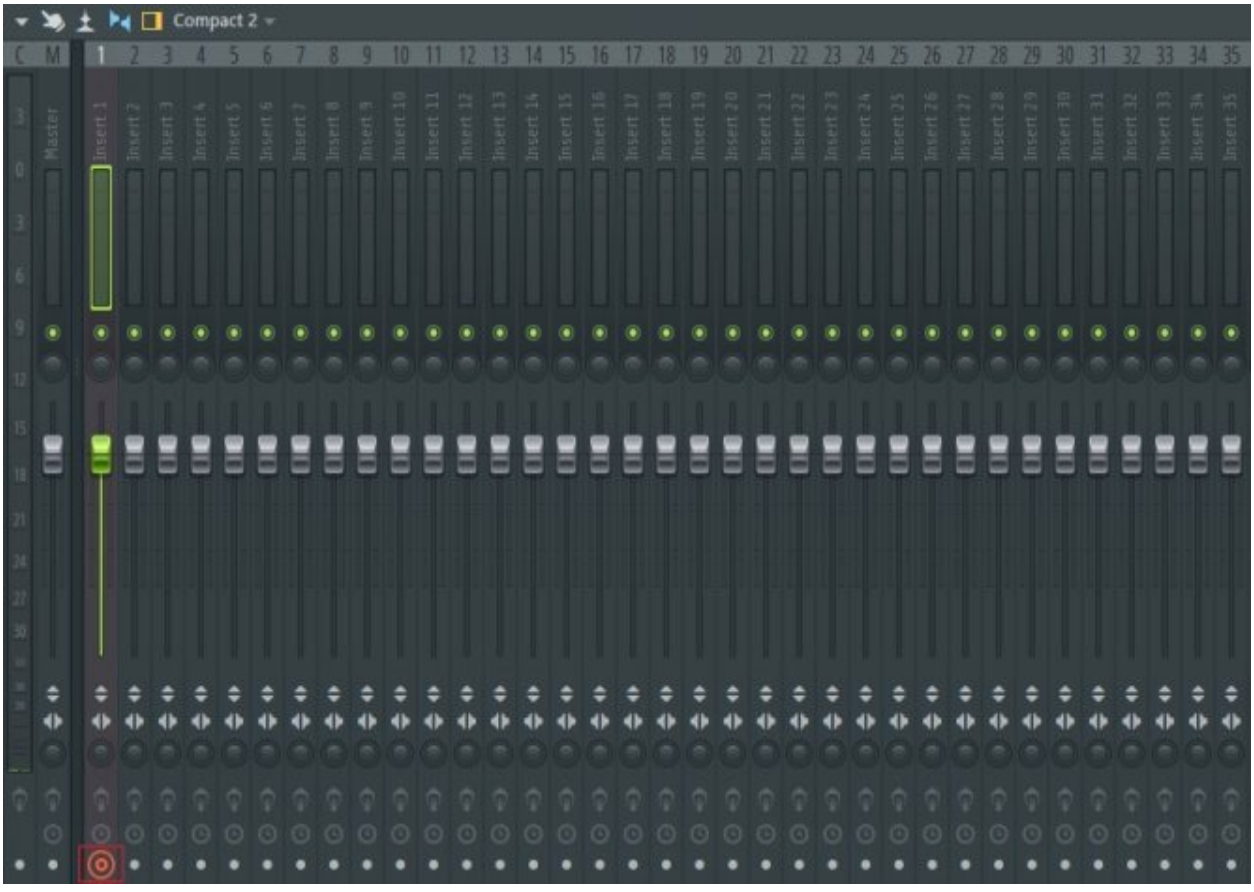
#1 – Ghost Notes

Being able to reference other notes you play can really help in creating melodies, harmonics and drum rhythms. It will let you make sure certain instruments aren't overlapping and also give you some guidance in bass lines for example. To enable ghost notes, open up the piano roll and from the top left dropdown menu, select Helpers>Ghost channels.

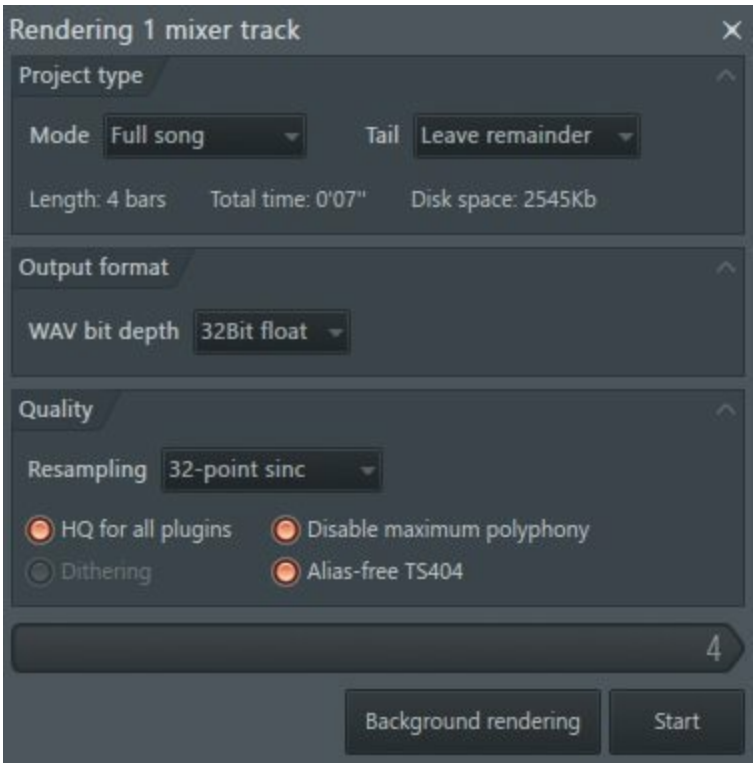
#2 – Saving CPU/RAM

Having many VST's open and playing melodies or chords can take up quite a bit of your computers hardware. Specifically the computers CPU and RAM is used up and you can track this by looking at the top right corner of your FL Studio interface. It says how many MB of memory is in use along with the CPU bar beside it. To avoid clipping and to be able to put more substance into our beats, you should render out your melodies, chords, etc into WAV forms. To do this, create your melody for example and then link that VST to a mixer insert. Also make sure you place the pattern its in onto the playlist. I've found this to work easier when I do this but it may work otherwise.

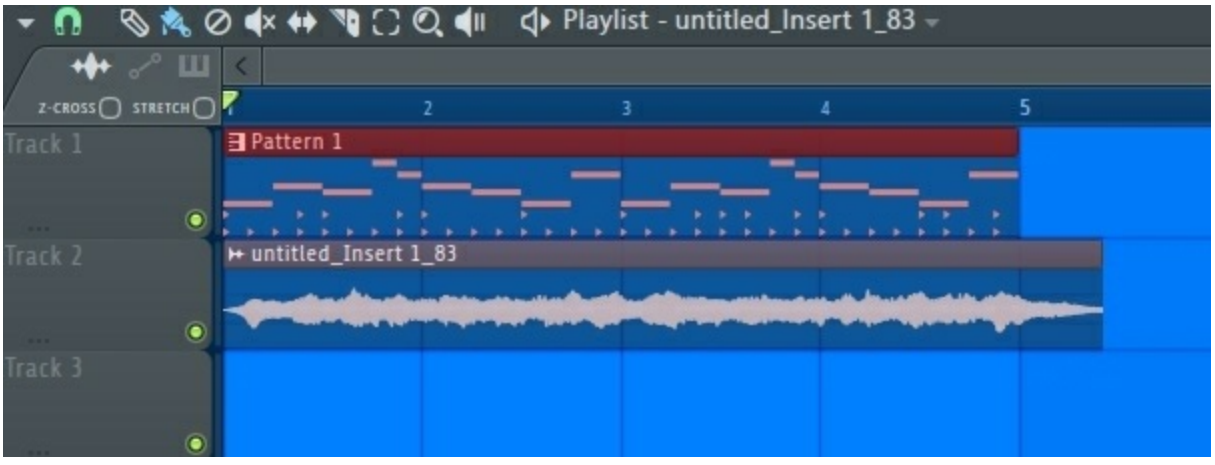
Once it is linked to a mixer insert, click the record button on the very bottom of the insert and it will turn red.



With it selected, simply hold Alt+R and a rendering window will pop up. Assure that the settings look like the following image and click “Start”. This will then render that melody you made into the playlist as a WAV form. For your computer to play a WAV file, it practically uses no computer hardware meaning you save RAM/CPU. You can add more elements to your song without worrying about clipping.



Navigate back to the playlist window and you should now see your new WAV form. Now since we are rendering out these notes which may carry reverb and delay, the length of the WAV file may be longer then 4 or 8 bars, depending what you are working with. Simply switch your snap-to-grid to “none” from the small magnet icon and zoom in to adjust it perfectly. While mixing you can add some extra reverb or delay if you find it cuts off too sudden.



Hi Hat & Snare Rolls

Ever wanted to get those cool hi hat and snare rolls you hear in any modern hip hop song? Well it's quite easy to do them with FL Studio. To begin, create a 2 step pattern like I showed you earlier and open up your piano roll window. Hit Control+L to lengthen all of the notes and you may have to manually lengthen the last one yourself.

Now to create a roll you have two different controls, the chop or the quick chop. Begin by holding control on your keyboard a selecting a note or multiple notes. Now hit Alt+U which is the chop tool shortcut.

The note(s) you highlighted will get chopped into smaller notes, making a roll. Turning the time multiplicator knob on top to the left will make a tighter roll with more notes. Now you can achieve the same thing even quicker by changing your snap-to-grid to something smaller like 1/2

step and hitting Control+U which will automatically make the chop. Your snap-to-grid size will dictate how small or big the roll becomes. Experiment with a few different sizes and you'll get a feel for it very quick.

Now some may argue that there's no specific areas that a roll should be placed but there are definitely spots it sounds great by default. These include:

- Right before a snare hit.
- Right before a clap.
- At the same time as a kick.

Rolls should be used to create extra momentum and groove in your beats.

More Realistic Sounding Samples

One of the downsides of a DAW like FL Studio is that sometimes your music can sound very robotic since it of course is made on a computer. The developers of Fruity Loops knew this and implemented some features to make your tracks sound like they were played by hand. Lets take this chord progression I just created as an example.

Playing it, the chords hit at the exact perfect time and all of their velocity(volume) is perfect as well. Can anyone actually play like that on a keyboard? Not unless your Mozart. So to make these sound a bit more realistic I am going to use two different features, the randomizer and the

strum effect.

By hitting Alt+R, the randomizer window opens and I deselect the pattern button or else this will create a random pattern. I leave the levels section enalbed and move the velocity knob a bit which changes the volume of every note slightly. The result is a much more realistic sounding piano.

The next thing I do is hit Alt+S which strums the chords. This moves all of the notes slightly ahead of each other so they don't hit at the exact same time. It's subtle but if you play around with the settings you can get very unique sounds.

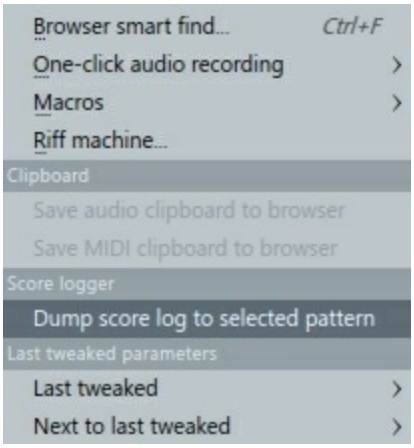
To get awesome key rolls like Zaytoven without the piano skills, there's a shortcut not many producers know of. You should first begin by having chords laid out like above. You can even copy them, paste them, and move them up an octave by hitting Control+Up arrow. Paste them a second time and move them down an octave with Control+Down arrow. This gives you very rich chords and it's best to select them all(Control+A) and drop their velocity to avoid clipping.

Either way, lay out some chords and then select the Slice tool on the tool bar. Drag the slicing tool down your chords in a diagonal shape. The more precise your snap-to-grid is, the tighter cuts you can make. Try it out in different spots and you'll get that Zaytoven sound pretty easily without needing years of piano experience.

Piano roll - GMS
Velocity
2
3
4
5
A5
G5
F5
E5
D5
C5
B4
A4
G4
F4
E4
D4

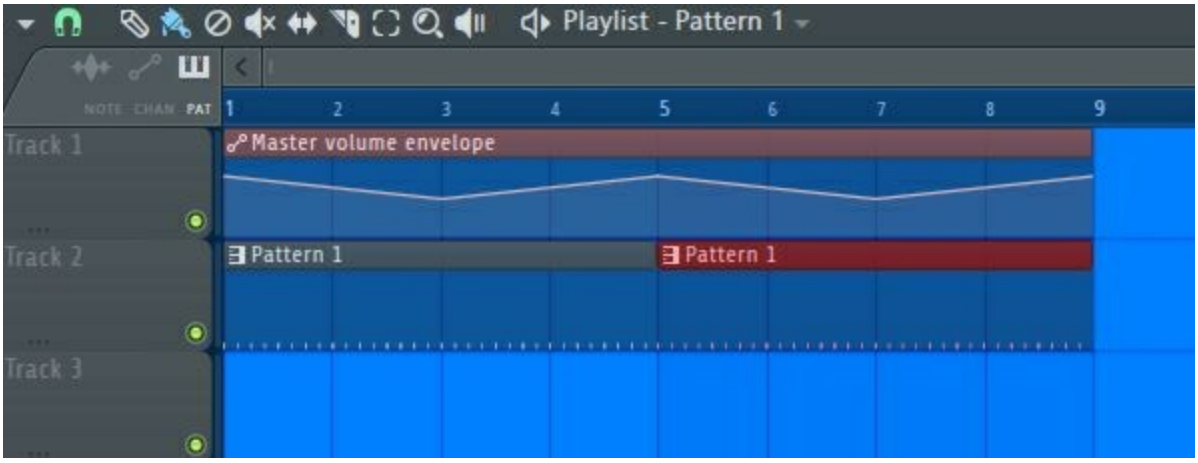
Dumping Score Logs

Have you ever been playing around on your MIDI keyboard for example and make an awesome melody then wish you would recorded it? Well thanks to FL Studio everything you play is actually secretly recorded for just that reason. If you ever find yourself in this situation again, simply navigate to tools on the main menu and select “Dump score log to selected pattern”.



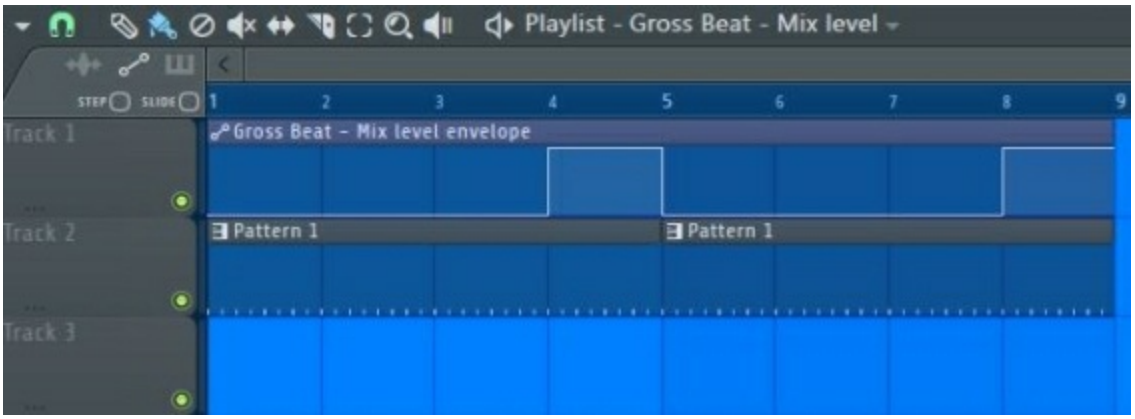
Automation Clips

Learning to use automation clips will transform your production and enable you to be much more creative. Automation is a feature in FL Studio that allows you to automate, as the name suggets, effects, volume and more. If you right click practically anything in FL, you'll see a “Create automation clip” option. Clicking this will place a new envelope onto your playlist and in your channel rack. They can seem a bit complicated at first but they are actually quite easy to use. Here's a great example below to understand them.



I have a 4 bar pattern laid out twice for a total of 8 bars. I right click the master volume controller beside the play/pause buttons and select “Create automation clip”. It places an 8 bar automation clip on the playlist. On the start of the 3rd and 7th bar I drop the volume down a small amount by right clicking on the automation clip to make a new point. If I were to play the beat, the volume would continue to go up and down. I recommend you try creating automation clips for different effects like panning, reverb, etc to get a feel for how it works.

I use it often for turning effects on and off which would look like below.


Playlist - Gross Beat - Mix level
STEP
SLIDE
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
Track 1
Gross Beat - Mix level envelope
Track 2
Pattern 1
Pattern 1
Track 3

Dragging the points all the way down means the effect or whatever you may be automating is completely turned off. By creating that box shape you see in the Gross Beat envelope, it's turning on completely at the 4th bar and off again until the 8th bar.

Templates

You can save a lot of time by customizing templates and then saving them for future tracks. Before anything I highly recommend that you always begin by selecting the basic template that FL Studio offers without the limiter. If you didn't know, the stock template includes a limiter on the master channel which can really distort your tracks if you aren't aware of it. To avoid this on future beats, just select the basic template like below.

Creating your own templates is just as easy. Lets say that you wanted to create a mastering template for example. You add your EQ, limiter, Maximus and whatever you like to your master channel. Once your done you simple click File>Save as and save it in your templates folder. When you restart FL Studio and go to the templates dropdown, you will see the name of your new template.

Layering Sounds

One simple technique that will make your music stand out and increase how difficult it is to copy is through layering. I like to do this with melodies, chords, leads, and pads specifically. Essentially any harmonic can be layered to make a more unique sound. All you have to do for this is simply copy and paste the notes into another VST. For example I may have a melody laid out with Nexus but I open an instance of Omnisphere, find a cool sample, and copy the notes over to it. The result is a richer melody that sounds much different than playing it alone with Nexus. Try this out for yourself and you'll be surprised with the results.

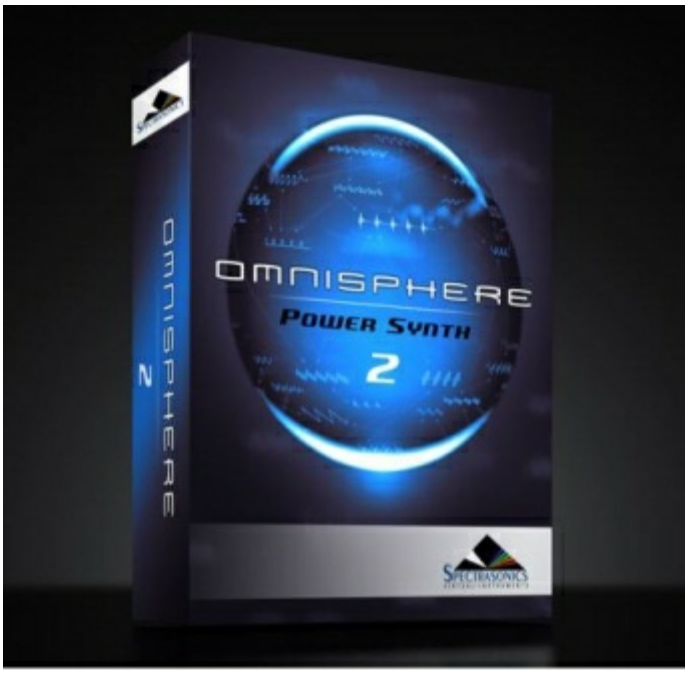
Chapter 6: Recommend Plugins

By default, FL Studio comes packed with a lot of plugins and VST's to use. To this day I still use tons of stock plugins because they are so great. You'll be missing out on a lot of great sounds, effects, and improvements if you don't ever get 3rd party VST's/plugins though. I'd like to briefly get into some of the best ones you can get and why.

Nexus2

Nexus is perhaps one of the most used 3rd party VST's to ever exist. It's simplest package comes with over 2,250 presets, 13 GB of samples, and works with Windows or Mac. It has everything from pianos, leads, strings, pads, to bells and more. There's endless samples to choose from and it comes with a built-in arpeggiator, multiple themes, and extremely in-depth modulation abilities. It's so popular you can also easily find Nexus preset banks to get even more sounds for free. I've used it personally for several years and it never get old. I constantly find myself opening an instance of Nexus and getting just what I need every time.

Omnisphere



Unarguably the most powerful VST on the market. It's a beast of over 55GB of samples that even composers like Hanz Zimmerman use. When I first got my hands on it, I remember thinking “How am I possibly going to use this many sounds?” and I was absolutely right. I still haven't even gotten close to hearing every sample because it comes with over 10,000. On top of that, you can layer multiple samples at once, use the arpeggiator and many other built-in tools. Whatever type of music you create, Ominsphere probably has more than enough samples for you to enjoy.

Camel Crusher

The go-to distortion and filter VST for many producers like myself. I find myself using Camel Crusher mostly to distort my 808 bass drums but it has many uses for mixing. The best part about it? It's free! If you want to get your hands on it, just search for it on Google and you'll find many sources to download it from. You'll also enjoy the compression, filtering and mastering that are all simple to use.

Kontakt 5

One of my favourite VST's is from the legendary brand Native Instruments whom are behind many other famous plugins. Kontakt 5 is packed with vintage samples, orchestral instruments, synths, organs and very realistic sounds. Any time I'm looking for strings, woodstring or similar I always tend to open up Kontakt and get what I need. There are tons of libraries you can install on top of the factory one that comes with Kontakt 5 that will get you any sound imaginable.

Chapter 7: Recommended Studio Equipment

If you want to produce the best possible music, you don't need a super expensive setup but you do need a few pieces of mandatory gear. I'd like to touch on some items that have improved my production over the years and have been me into a better musician overall.

1. **Studio monitors**: If you don't know the difference between studio monitors and regular speakers, you may be in some trouble. Studio monitors are special speakers that don't add ***any*** frequencies to your mix. This is crucial because it gives you the most accurate possible sound. If you were to produce with traditional headphones or speakers, you may end up getting an in-accurate mix because they could be adding to the low, mid or highs. For example Beats headphones which are very popular add a lot of bass which may trick you into thinking your low end is louder than it really is. You can also get studio monitor headphones if you want something a bit more mobile.
2. **MIDI keyboard**: I don't come from any musical background before I began producing so picking up a keyboard was a bit intimidating. Learning to play keys from a few YouTube videos though gave me a lot of confidence and creative control. No longer did I have to click in notes on FL Studio but rather could freestyle and record whatever I though of. I highly recommend even picking up a small 25 key MIDI controller for your studio setup.
3. **Audio interface**: An audio interface is essentially an external sound card except it yields much higher quality and connectivity. They will allow you to connect mics, instruments, stereos and more at once to improve every elements sound. You can find great audio interfaces for as little as $50 on Amazon.

Thank you for taking the time to this read this book. I hope you learned a thing or two that will improve your music production while doing so. I may be releasing more music and FL Studio related books in the future so stay tuned for that. In the mean time, have fun producing and keep on striving to improve your sound.